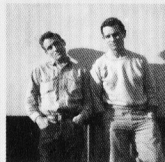
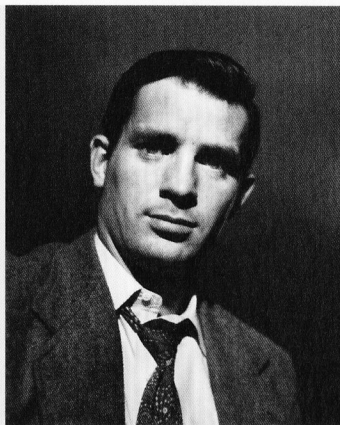


With an Introduction by  
Ann Charters

'It changed my  
life like it changed  
everyone else's'

Bob Dylan

*On the Road* swings to the rhythms of 1950s underground America, jazz, sex, generosity, chill dawns and drugs, with Sal Paradise and his hero Dean Moriarty, traveller and mystic, the living epitome of Beat. Now recognized as a modern classic, Kerouac's American Dream is nearer that of Walt Whitman than F. Scott Fitzgerald's, and the narrative goes racing towards the sunset with unforgettable exuberance, poignancy and passion.



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MODERN  
CLASSICS

Jack Kerouac  
On the Road



## *Part One*

### 1

I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports of him came to me through Chad King, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in a New Mexico reform school. I was tremendously interested in the letters because they so naively and sweetly asked Chad to teach him all about Nietzsche and all the wonderful intellectual things that Chad knew. At one point Carlo and I talked about the letters and wondered if we would ever meet the strange Dean Moriarty. This is all far back, when Dean was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Dean was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a girl called Marylou.

One day I was hanging around the campus and Chad and Tim Gray told me Dean was staying in a cold water pad in East Harlem, the Spanish Harlem. Dean had arrived the night before, the first time in New York, with his beautiful little sharp chick Marylou; they got off the Greyhound bus at 50th Street and cut around the corner



looking for a place to eat and went right in Hector's, and since then Hector's cafeteria has always been a big symbol of New York for Dean. They spent money on beautiful big glazed cakes and cream puffs.

All this time Dean was telling Marylou things like this: 'Now, darling, here we are in New York and although I haven't quite told you everything that I was thinking about when we crossed Missouri and especially at the point when we passed the Booneville reformatory which reminded me of my jail problem, it is absolutely necessary now to postpone all those leftover things concerning our personal lovetings and at once begin thinking of specific worklife plans . . .' and so on in the way that he had in those early days.

I went to the cold-water flat with the boys, and Dean came to the door in his shorts. Marylou was jumping off the couch; Dean had dispatched the occupant of the apartment to the kitchen, probably to make coffee, while he proceeded with his loveproblems, for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on. You saw that in the way he stood bobbing his head, always looking down, nodding, like a young boxer to instructions, to make you think he was listening to every word, throwing in a thousand 'Yeses' and 'That's rights.' My first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry – trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent – a sideburned hero of the snowy West. In fact he'd just been working on a ranch, Ed Wall's in Colorado, before marrying Marylou and coming East. Marylou was a pretty blonde with immense ringlets of hair like a sea of golden tresses; she sat there on the edge of the couch with her hands hanging in her lap and her smoky blue country eyes fixed in a wide stare because she was in an evil gray New York pad that she'd heard about back West, and waiting like a longbodied emaciated Modigliani surrealist woman in a serious room. But, outside of being a sweet little girl, she was awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things. That night we all drank beer and pulled wrists and talked till dawn, and in the morning, while we sat around dumbly smoking butts from ashtrays in the gray light of a gloomy day, Dean got up nervously, paced around, thinking, and decided the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor. 'In other words

we've got to get on the ball, darling, what I'm saying, otherwise it'll be fluctuating and lack of true knowledge or crystallization of our plans.' Then I went away.

During the following week he confided in Chad King that he absolutely had to learn how to write from him; Chad said I was a writer and he should come to me for advice. Meanwhile Dean had gotten a job in a parking lot, had a fight with Marylou in their Hoboken apartment – God knows why they went there – and she was so mad and so down deep vindictive that she reported to the police some false trumped-up hysterical crazy charge, and Dean had to lam from Hoboken. So he had no place to live. He came right out to Paterson, New Jersey, where I was living with my aunt, and one night while I was studying there was a knock on the door, and there was Dean, bowing, shuffling obsequiously in the dark of the hall, and saying, 'Hel-lo, you remember me – Dean Moriarty? I've come to ask you to show me how to write.'

'And where's Marylou?' I asked, and Dean said she'd apparently whored a few dollars together and gone back to Denver – 'the whore!' So we went out to have a few beers because we couldn't talk like we wanted to talk in front of my aunt, who sat in the living room reading her paper. She took one look at Dean and decided that he was a madman.

In the bar I told Dean, 'Hell, man, I know very well you didn't come to me only to want to become a writer, and after all what do I really know about it except you've got to stick to it with the energy of a benny addict.' And he said, 'Yes, of course, I know exactly what you mean and in fact all those problems have occurred to me, but the thing that I want is the realization of those factors that should one depend on Schopenhauer's dichotomy for any inwardly realized . . .' and so on in that way, things I understood not a bit and he himself didn't. In those days he really didn't know what he was talking about; that is to say, he was a young jaillid all hung-up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real intellectual, and he liked to talk in the tone and using the words, but in a jumbled way, that he had heard from 'real intellectuals' – although, mind you, he wasn't so naïve as that in all other things, and it took him just a few

months with Carlo Marx to become completely *in there* with all the terms and jargon. Nonetheless we understood each other on other levels of madness, and I agreed that he could stay at my house till he found a job and furthermore we agreed to go out West sometime. That was the winter of 1947.

One night when Dean ate supper at my house – he already had the parking-lot job in New York – he leaned over my shoulder as I typed rapidly away and said, ‘Come on man, those girls won’t wait, make it fast.’

I said, ‘Hold on just a minute, I’ll be right with you soon as I finish this chapter,’ and it was one of the best chapters in the book. Then I dressed and off we flew to New York to meet some girls. As we rode in the bus in the weird phosphorescent void of the Lincoln Tunnel we leaned on each other with fingers waving and yelled and talked excitedly, and I was beginning to get the bug like Dean. He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me and I knew it (for room and board and ‘how-to-write,’ etc.), and he knew I knew (this has been the basis of our relationship), but I didn’t care and we got along fine – no pestering, no catering; we tiptoed around each other like heartbreaking new friends. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me. As far as my work was concerned he said, ‘Go ahead, everything you do is great.’ He watched over my shoulder as I wrote stories, yelling, ‘Yes! That’s right! Wow! Man!’ and ‘Phew!’ and wiped his face with his handkerchief. ‘Man, wow, there’s so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even *begin* to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears . . .’

‘That’s right, man, now you’re talking.’ And a kind of holy lightning I saw flashing from his excitement and his visions, which he described so torrentially that people in buses looked around to see the ‘overexcited nut.’ In the West he’d spent a third of his time in the poolhall, a third in jail, and a third in the public library. They’d seen him rushing eagerly down the winter streets, bareheaded, carrying books

to the poolhall, or climbing trees to get into the attics of buddies where he spent days reading or hiding from the law.

We went to New York – I forget what the situation was, two colored girls – there were no girls there; they were supposed to meet him in a diner and didn’t show up. We went to his parking lot where he had a few things to do – change his clothes in the shack in back and spruce up a bit in front of a cracked mirror and so on, and then we took off. And that was the night Dean met Carlo Marx. A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes – the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx. From that moment on I saw very little of Dean, and I was a little sorry too. Their energies met head-on, I was a lout compared, I couldn’t keep up with them. The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American Night. Carlo told him of Old Bull Lee, Elmer Hassel, Jane: Lee in Texas growing weed, Hassel on Riker’s Island, Jane wandering on Times Square in a benzedrine hallucination, with her baby girl in her arms and ending up in Bellevue. And Dean told Carlo of unknown people in the West like Tommy Snark, the clubfooted poolhall rotation shark and cardplayer and queer saint. He told him of Roy Johnson, Big Ed Dunkel, his boyhood buddies, his street buddies, his innumerable girls and sex-parties and pornographic pictures, his heroes, heroines, adventures. They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank. But then they danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’ What did they call such young people in Goethe’s Germany?



Wanting dearly to learn how to write like Carlo, the first thing you know, Dean was attacking him with a great amorous soul such as only a con-man can have. 'Now, Carlo, let *me* speak – here's what *I'm* saying . . .' I didn't see them for about two weeks, during which time they cemented their relationship to fiendish all-day-all-night-talk proportions.

Then came spring, the great time of traveling, and everybody in the scattered gang was getting ready to take one trip or another. I was busily at work on my novel and when I came to the halfway mark, after a trip down South with my aunt to visit my brother Rocco, I got ready to travel West for the very first time.

Dean had already left. Carlo and I saw him off at the 34th Street Greyhound station. Upstairs they had a place where you could make pictures for a quarter. Carlo took off his glasses and looked sinister. Dean made a profile shot and looked coyly around. I took a straight picture that made me look like a thirty-year-old Italian who'd kill anybody who said anything against his mother. This picture Carlo and Dean neatly cut down the middle with a razor and saved a half each in their wallets. Dean was wearing a real Western business suit for his big trip back to Denver; he'd finished his first fling in New York. I say fling, but he only worked like a dog in parking lots. The most fantastic parking-lot attendant in the world, he can back a car forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze and stop at the wall, jump out, race among fenders, leap into another car, circle it fifty miles an hour in a narrow space, back swiftly into tight spot, *hump*, snap the car with the emergency so that you see it bounce as he flies out; then clear to the ticket shack, sprinting like a track star, hand a ticket, leap into a newly arrived car before the owner's half out, leap literally under him as he steps out, start the car with the door flapping, and roar off to the next available spot, arc, pop in, brake, out, run; working like that without pause eight hours a night, evening rush hours and after-theater rush hours, in greasy wino pants with a frayed fur-lined jacket and beat shoes that flap. Now he'd bought a new suit to go back in; blue with pencil stripes, vest and all – eleven dollars on Third Avenue, with a watch and watch chain, and a portable typewriter with which he was going to start writing in a Denver rooming house as

soon as he got a job there. We had a farewell meal of franks and beans in a Seventh Avenue Riker's, and then Dean got on the bus that said Chicago and roared off into the night. There went our wrangler. I promised myself to go the same way when spring really bloomed and opened up the land.

And this was really the way that my whole road experience began, and the things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell.

Yes, and it wasn't only because I was a writer and needed new experiences that I wanted to know Dean more, and because my life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified, but because, somehow, in spite of our difference in character, he reminded me of some long-lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dumps and swim-holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic. His dirty workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn't buy a better fit from a custom tailor but only earn it from the Natural Tailor of Natural Joy, as Dean had, in his stresses. And in his excited way of speaking I heard again the voices of old companions and brothers under the bridge, among the motorcycles, along the wash-lined neighborhood and drowsy doorsteps of afternoon where boys played guitars while their older brothers worked in the mills. All my other current friends were 'intellectuals' – Chad the Nietzschean anthropologist, Carlo Marx and his nutty surrealist low-voiced serious staring talk, Old Bull Lee and his critical anti-everything drawl – or else they were slinking criminals like Elmer Hassel, with that hip sneer; Jane Lee the same, sprawled on the Oriental cover of her couch, sniffing at the *New Yorker*. But Dean's intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his 'criminality' was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides). Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or

political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the other, 'so long's I can get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs, boy,' and 'so long's we can *eat*, son, y'ear me? I'm *hungry*, I'm *starving*, let's *eat right now!*' – and off we'd rush to *eat*, whereof, as saith Ecclesiastes, 'It is your portion under the sun.'

A western kinsman of the sun, Dean. Although my aunt warned me that he would get me in trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age; and a little bit of trouble or even Dean's eventual rejection of me as a buddy, putting me down, as he would later, on starving sidewalks and sickbeds – what did it matter? I was a young writer and I wanted to take off.

Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me.



her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*. And we moved! We flashed past the mysterious white signs in the night somewhere in New Jersey that say SOUTH (with an arrow) and WEST (with an arrow) and took the south one. New Orleans! It burned in our brains. From the dirty snows of 'frosty fagtown New York,' as Dean called it, all the way to the greeneries and river smells of old New Orleans at the washed-out bottom of America; then west. Ed was in the back seat; Marylou and Dean and I sat in front and had the warmest talk about the goodness and joy of life. Dean suddenly became tender. 'Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine and there's no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we're NOT REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?' We all agreed. 'Here we go, we're all together . . . What did we do in New York? Let's forgive.' We all had our spats back there. 'That's behind us, merely by miles and inclinations. Now we're heading down to New Orleans to dig Old Bull Lee and ain't that going to be kicks and listen will you to this old tenorman blow his top' – he shot up the radio volume till the car shuddered – 'and listen to him tell the story and put down true relaxation and knowledge.'

We all jumped to the music and agreed. The purity of the road. The white line in the middle of the highway unrolled and hugged our left front tire as if glued to our groove. Dean hunched his muscular neck, T-shirted in the winter night, and blasted the car along. He insisted I drive through Baltimore for traffic practice; that was all right, except he and Marylou insisted on steering while they kissed and fooled around. It was crazy; the radio was on full blast. Dean beat drums on the dashboard till a great sag developed in it; I did too. The poor Hudson – the slow boat to China – was receiving her beating.

'Oh man, what kicks!' yelled Dean. 'Now Marylou, listen really, honey, you know that I'm hotrock capable of everything at the same time and I have unlimited energy – now in San Francisco we must go on living together. I know just the place for you – at the end of

It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. 'Whoeee!' yelled Dean. 'Here we go!' And he hunched over the wheel and gunned

the regular chain-gang run – I'll be home just a cut-hair less than every two days and for twelve hours at a stretch, and *man*, you know what we can do in twelve hours, darling. Meanwhile I'll go right on living at Camille's like nothin, see, she won't know. We can work it, we've done it before.' It was all right with Marylou, she was really out for Camille's scalp. The understanding had been that Marylou would switch to me in Frisco, but I now began to see they were going to stick and I was going to be left alone on my butt at the other end of the continent. But why think about that when all the golden land's ahead of you and all kinds of unforeseen events wait lurking to surprise you and make you glad you're alive to see?

We arrived in Washington at dawn. It was the day of Harry Truman's inauguration for his second term. Great displays of war might were lined along Pennsylvania Avenue as we rolled by in our battered boat. There were B-29s, PT boats, artillery, all kinds of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass; the last thing was a regular small ordinary lifeboat that looked pitiful and foolish. Dean slowed down to look at it. He kept shaking his head in awe. 'What are these people up to? Harry's sleeping somewhere in this town . . . Good old Harry . . . Man from Missouri, as I am . . . That must be his own boat.'

Dean went to sleep in the back seat and Dunkel drove. We gave him specific instructions to take it easy. No sooner were we snoring than he gunned the car up to eighty, bad bearings and all, and not only that but he made a triple pass at a spot where a cop was arguing with a motorist – he was in the fourth lane of a four-lane highway, going the wrong way. Naturally the cop took after us with his siren whining. We were stopped. He told us to follow him to the station house. There was a mean cop in there who took an immediate dislike to Dean; he could smell jail all over him. He sent his cohort outdoors to question Marylou and me privately. They wanted to know how old Marylou was, they were trying to whip up a Mann Act idea. But she had her marriage certificate. Then they took me aside alone and wanted to know who was sleeping with Marylou. 'Her husband,' I said quite simply. They were curious. Something was fishy. They tried some amateur Sherlocking by asking the same questions twice,

expecting us to make a slip. I said, 'Those two fellows are going back to work on the railroad in California, this is the short one's wife, and I'm a friend on a two-week vacation from college.'

The cop smiled and said, 'Yeah? Is this really your own wallet?'

Finally the mean one inside fined Dean twenty-five dollars. We told them we only had forty to go all the way to the Coast; they said that made no difference to them. When Dean protested, the mean cop threatened to take him back to Pennsylvania and slap a special charge on him.

'What charge?'

'Never mind what charge. Don't worry about *that*, wise guy.'

We had to give them the twenty-five. But first Ed Dunkel, that culprit, offered to go to jail. Dean considered it. The cop was infuriated; he said, 'If you let your partner go to jail I'm taking you back to Pennsylvania right now. You hear that?' All we wanted to do was go. 'Another speeding ticket in Virginia and you lose your car,' said the mean cop as a parting volley. Dean was red in the face. We drove off silently. It was just like an invitation to steal to take our trip-money away from us. They knew we were broke and had no relatives on the road or to wire to for money. The American police are involved in psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers and threats. It's a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don't exist to its satisfaction. 'Nine lines of crime, one of boredom,' said Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Dean was so mad he wanted to come back to Virginia and shoot the cop as soon as he had a gun.

'Pennsylvania!' he scoffed. 'I wish I knew what that charge was! Vag, probably; take all my money and charge me vag. Those guys have it so damn easy. They'll out and shoot you if you complain, too.' There was nothing to do but get happy with ourselves again and forget about it. When we got through Richmond we began forgetting about it, and soon everything was okay.

Now we had fifteen dollars to go all the way. We'd have to pick up hitchhikers and bum quarters off them for gas. In the Virginia wilderness suddenly we saw a man walking on the road. Dean zoomed



to a stop. I looked back and said he was only a bum and probably didn't have a cent.

'We'll just pick him up for kicks!' Dean laughed. The man was a ragged, bespectacled mad type, walking along reading a paperbacked muddy book he'd found in a culvert by the road. He got in the car and went right on reading; he was incredibly filthy and covered with scabs. He said his name was Hyman Solomon and that he walked all over the USA, knocking and sometimes kicking at Jewish doors and demanding money: 'Give me money to eat, I am a Jew.'

He said it worked very well and that it was coming to him. We asked him what he was reading. He didn't know. He didn't bother to look at the title page. He was only looking at the words, as though he had found the real Torah where it belonged, in the wilderness.

'See? See? See?' cackled Dean, poking my ribs. 'I told you it was kicks. Everybody's kicks, man!' We carried Solomon all the way to Testament. My brother by now was in his new house on the other side of town. Here we were back on the long, bleak street with the railroad track running down the middle and the sad, sullen Southerners loping in front of hardware stores and five-and-tens.

Solomon said, 'I see you people need a little money to continue your journey. You wait for me and I'll go hustle up a few dollars at a Jewish home and I'll go along with you as far as Alabama.' Dean was all beside himself with happiness; he and I rushed off to buy bread and cheese spread for a lunch in the car. Marylou and Ed waited in the car. We spent two hours in Testament waiting for Hyman Solomon to show up; he was hustling for his bread somewhere in town, but we couldn't see him. The sun began to grow red and late.

Solomon never showed up so we roared out of Testament. 'Now you see, Sal, God does exist, because we keep getting hung-up with this town, no matter what we try to do, and you'll notice the strange Biblical name of it, and that strange Biblical character who made us stop here once more, and all things tied together all over like rain connecting everybody the world over by chain touch . . .' Dean rattled on like this; he was overjoyed and exuberant. He and I suddenly saw the whole country like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there, the pearl was there. Off we roared south. We picked up another

hitchhiker. This was a sad young kid who said he had an aunt who owned a grocery store in Dunn, North Carolina, right outside Fayetteville. 'When we get there can you bum a buck off her? Right! Fine! Let's go!' We were in Dunn in an hour, at dusk. We drove to where the kid said his aunt had the grocery store. It was a sad little street that dead-ended at a factory wall. There was a grocery store but there was no aunt. We wondered what the kid was talking about. We asked him how far he was going; he didn't know. It was a big hoax; once upon a time, in some lost back-alley adventure, he had seen the grocery store in Dunn, and it was the first story that popped into his disordered, feverish mind. We bought him a hot dog, but Dean said we couldn't take him along because we needed room to sleep and room for hitchhikers who could buy a little gas. This was sad but true. We left him in Dunn at nightfall.

I drove through South Carolina and beyond Macon, Georgia, as Dean, Marylou, and Ed slept. All alone in the night I had my own thoughts and held the car to the white line in the holy road. What was I doing? Where was I going? I'd soon find out. I got dog-tired beyond Macon and woke up Dean to resume. We got out of the car for air and suddenly both of us were stoned with joy to realize that in the darkness all around us was fragrant green grass and the smell of fresh manure and warm waters. 'We're in the South! We've left the winter!' Faint daybreak illuminated green shoots by the side of the road. I took a deep breath; a locomotive howled across the darkness, Mobile-bound. So were we. I took off my shirt and exulted. Ten miles down the road Dean drove into a filling station with the motor off, noticed that the attendant was fast asleep at the desk, jumped out, quietly filled the gas tank, saw to it the bell didn't ring, and rolled off like an Arab with a five-dollar tankful of gas for our pilgrimage.

I slept and woke up to the crazy exultant sounds of music and Dean and Marylou talking and the great green land rolling by. 'Where are we?'

'Just passed the tip of Florida, man - Flomaton, it's called.' Florida! We were rolling down to the coastal plain and Mobile; up ahead were great soaring clouds of the Gulf of Mexico. It was only thirty-two hours since we'd said good-by to everybody in the dirty snows of the

North. We stopped at a gas station, and there Dean and Marylou played piggyback around the tanks and Dunkel went inside and stole three packs of cigarettes without trying. We were fresh out. Rolling into Mobile over the long tidal highway, we all took our winter clothes off and enjoyed the Southern temperature. This was when Dean started telling his life story and when, beyond Mobile, he came upon an obstruction of wrangling cars at a crossroads and instead of slipping around them just balled right through the driveway of a gas station and went right on without relaxing his steady continental seventy. We left gaping faces behind us. He went right on with his tale. 'I tell you it's true, I started at nine, with a girl called Milly Mayfair in back of Rod's garage on Grant Street – same street Carlo lived on in Denver. That's when my father was still working at the smithy's a bit. I remember my aunt yelling out the window, "What are you doing down there in back of the garage?" Oh honey Marylou, if I'd only known you then! Wow! How sweet you musta been at nine.' He tittered maniacally; he stuck his finger in her mouth and licked it; he took her hand and rubbed it over himself. She just sat there, smiling serenely.

Big long Ed Dunkel sat looking out the window, talking to himself. 'Yes sir, I thought I was a ghost that night.' He was also wondering what Galatea Dunkel would say to him in New Orleans.

Dean went on. 'One time I rode a freight from New Mexico clear to LA – I was eleven years old, lost my father at a siding, we were all in a hobo jungle, I was with a man called Big Red, my father was out drunk in a boxcar – it started to roll – Big Red and I missed it – I didn't see my father for months. I rode a long freight all the way to California, really flying, first-class freight, a desert Zipper. All the way I rode over the couplings – you can imagine how dangerous, I was only a kid, I didn't know – clutching a loaf of bread under one arm and the other hooked around the brake bar. This is no story, this is true. When I got to LA I was so starved for milk and cream I got a job in a dairy and the first thing I did I drank two quarts of heavy cream and puked.'

'Poor Dean,' said Marylou, and she kissed him. He stared ahead proudly. He loved her.

We were suddenly driving along the blue waters of the Gulf, and at the same time a momentous mad thing began on the radio; it was the Chicken Jazz'n Gumbo disk-jockey show from New Orleans, all mad jazz'n records, colored records, with the disk jockey saying, 'Don't worry 'bout *nothing!*' We saw New Orleans in the night ahead of us with joy. Dean rubbed his hands over the wheel. 'Now we're going to get our kicks!' At dusk we were coming into the humming streets of New Orleans. 'Oh, smell the people!' yelled Dean with his face out the window, sniffing. 'Ah! God! Life!' He swung around a trolley. 'Yes!' He darted the car and looked in every direction for girls. 'Look at *her!*' The air was so sweet in New Orleans it seemed to come in soft bandannas; and you could smell the river and really smell the people, and mud, and molasses, and every kind of tropical exhalation with your nose suddenly removed from the dry ices of a Northern winter. We bounced in our seats. 'And dig her!' yelled Dean, pointing at another woman. 'Oh, I love, love, love women! I think women are wonderful! I love women!' He spat out the window; he groaned; he clutched his head. Great beads of sweat fell from his forehead from pure excitement and exhaustion.

We bounced the car up on the Algiers ferry and found ourselves crossing the Mississippi River by boat. 'Now we must all get out and dig the river and the people and smell the world,' said Dean, bustling with his sunglasses and cigarettes and leaping out of the car like a jack-in-the-box. We followed. On rails we leaned and looked at the great brown father of waters rolling down from mid-America like the torrent of broken souls – bearing Montana logs and Dakota muds and Iowa vales and things that had drowned in Three Forks, where the secret began in ice. Smoky New Orleans receded on one side; old, sleepy Algiers with its warped woodsides bumped us on the other. Negroes were working in the hot afternoon, stoking the ferry furnaces that burned red and made our tires smell. Dean dug them, hopping up and down in the heat. He rushed around the deck and upstairs with his baggy pants hanging halfway down his belly. Suddenly I saw him eagering on the flying bridge. I expected him to take off on wings. I heard his mad laugh all over the boat – 'Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee!' Marylou was with him. He covered everything in a jiffy, came back



with the full story, jumped in the car just as everybody was tooting to go, and we slipped off, passing two or three cars in a narrow space, and found ourselves darting through Algiers.

'Where? Where?' Dean was yelling.

We decided first to clean up at a gas station and inquire for Bull's whereabouts. Little children were playing in the drowsy river sunset; girls were going by with bandannas and cotton blouses and bare legs. Dean ran up the street to see everything. He looked around; he nodded; he rubbed his belly. Big Ed sat back in the car with his hat over his eyes, smiling at Dean. I sat on the fender. Marylou was in the women's john. From bushy shores where infinitesimal men fished with sticks, and from delta sleeps that stretched up along the reddening land, the big humpbacked river with its mainstream leaping came coiling around Algiers like a snake, with a nameless rumble. Drowsy, peninsular Algiers with all her bees and shanties was like to be washed away someday. The sun slanted, bugs flip-flopped, the awful waters groaned.

We went to Old Bull Lee's house outside town near the river levee. It was on a road that ran across a swampy field. The house was a dilapidated old heap with sagging porches running around and weeping willows in the yard; the grass was a yard high, old fences leaned, old barns collapsed. There was no one in sight. We pulled right into the yard and saw washtubs on the back porch. I got out and went to the screen door. Jane Lee was standing in it with her eyes cupped toward the sun. 'Jane,' I said. 'It's me. It's us.'

She knew that. 'Yes, I know. Bull isn't here now. Isn't that a fire or something over there?' We both looked toward the sun.

'You mean the sun?'

'Of course I don't mean the sun - I heard sirens that way. Don't you know a peculiar glow?' It was toward New Orleans; the clouds were strange.

'I don't see anything,' I said.

Jane snuffed down her nose. 'Same old Paradise.'

That was the way we greeted each other after four years; Jane used to live with my wife and me in New York. 'And is Galatea Dunkel here?' I asked. Jane was still looking for her fire; in those days she ate

three tubes of benzedrine paper a day. Her face, once plump and Germanic and pretty, had become stony and red and gaunt. She had caught polio in New Orleans and limped a little. Sheepishly Dean and the gang came out of the car and more or less made themselves at home. Galatea Dunkel came out of her stately retirement in the back of the house to meet her tormentor. Galatea was a serious girl. She was pale and looked like tears all over. Big Ed passed his hand through his hair and said hello. She looked at him steadily.

'Where have you been? Why did you do this to me?' And she gave Dean a dirty look; she knew the score. Dean paid absolutely no attention; what he wanted now was food; he asked Jane if there was anything. The confusion began right there.

Poor Bull came home in his Texas Chevy and found his house invaded by maniacs; but he greeted me with a nice warmth I hadn't seen in him for a long time. He had bought this house in New Orleans with some money he had made growing black-eyed peas in Texas with an old college schoolmate whose father, a mad parietic, had died and left a fortune. Bull himself only got fifty dollars a week from his own family, which wasn't too bad except that he spent almost that much per week on his drug habit - and his wife was also expensive, gobbling up about ten dollars' worth of benny tubes a week. Their food bill was the lowest in the country; they hardly ever ate; nor did the children - they didn't seem to care. They had two wonderful children: Dodie, eight years old; and little Ray, one year. Ray ran around stark naked in the yard, a little blond child of the rainbow. Bull called him 'the Little Beast,' after W. C. Fields. Bull came driving into the yard and unrolled himself from the car bone by bone, and came over wearily, wearing glasses, felt hat, shabby suit, long, lean, strange, and laconic, saying, 'Why, Sal, you finally got here; let's go in the house and have a drink.'

It would take all night to tell about Old Bull Lee; let's just say now, he was a teacher, and it may be said that he had every right to teach because he spent all his time learning; and the things he learned were what he considered to be and called 'the facts of life,' which he learned not only out of necessity but because he wanted to. He dragged his long, thin body around the entire United States and most of Europe

and North Africa in his time, only to see what was going on; he married a White Russian countess in Yugoslavia to get her away from the Nazis in the thirties; there are pictures of him with the international cocaine set of the thirties – gangs with wild hair, leaning on one another; there are other pictures of him in a Panama hat, surveying the streets of Algiers; he never saw the White Russian countess again. He was an exterminator in Chicago, a bartender in New York, a summons-server in Newark. In Paris he sat at café tables, watching the sullen French faces go by. In Athens he looked up from his *ouzo* at what he called the ugliest people in the world. In Istanbul he threaded his way through crowds of opium addicts and rug-sellers, looking for the facts. In English hotels he read Spengler and the Marquis de Sade. In Chicago he planned to hold up a Turkish bath, hesitated just for two minutes too long for a drink, and wound up with two dollars and had to make a run for it. He did all these things merely for the experience. Now the final study was the drug habit. He was now in New Orleans, slipping along the streets with shady characters and haunting connection bars.

There is a strange story about his college days that illustrates something else about him: he had friends for cocktails in his well-appointed rooms one afternoon when suddenly his pet ferret rushed out and bit an elegant teacup queer on the ankle and everybody hightailed it out the door, screaming. Old Bull leaped up and grabbed his shotgun and said, 'He smells that old rat again,' and shot a hole in the wall big enough for fifty rats. On the wall hung a picture of an ugly old Cape Cod house. His friends said, 'Why do you have that ugly thing hanging there?' and Bull said, 'I like it because it's ugly.' All his life was in that line. Once I knocked on his door in the 60th Street slums of New York and he opened it wearing a derby hat, a vest with nothing underneath, and long striped sharpster pants; in his hands he had a cookpot, birdseed in the pot, and was trying to mash the seed to roll in cigarettes. He also experimented in boiling codeine cough syrup down to a black mash – that didn't work too well. He spent long hours with Shakespeare – the 'Immortal Bard,' he called him – on his lap. In New Orleans he had begun to spend long hours with the Mayan Codices on his lap, and, although he went

on talking, the book lay open all the time. I said once, 'What's going to happen to us when we die?' and he said, 'When you die you're just dead, that's all.' He had a set of chains in his room that he said he used with his psychoanalyst; they were experimenting with narcoanalysis and found that Old Bull had seven separate personalities, each growing worse and worse on the way down, till finally he was a raving idiot and had to be restrained with chains. The top personality was an English lord, the bottom the idiot. Halfway he was an old Negro who stood in line, waiting with everyone else, and said, 'Some's bastards, some's ain't, that's the score.'

Bull had a sentimental streak about the old days in America, especially 1910, when you could get morphine in a drugstore without prescription and Chinese smoked opium in their evening windows and the country was wild and brawling and free, with abundance and any kind of freedom for everyone. His chief hate was Washington bureaucracy; second to that, liberals; then cops. He spent all his time talking and teaching others. Jane sat at his feet; so did I; so did Dean; and so had Carlo Marx. We'd all learned from him. He was a gray, nondescript-looking fellow you wouldn't notice on the street, unless you looked closer and saw his mad, bony skull with its strange youthfulness – a Kansas minister with exotic, phenomenal fires and mysteries. He had studied medicine in Vienna; had studied anthropology, read everything; and now he was settling to his life's work, which was the study of things themselves in the streets of life and the night. He sat in his chair; Jane brought drinks, martinis. The shades by his chair were always drawn, day and night; it was his corner of the house. On his lap were the Mayan Codices and an air gun which he occasionally raised to pop benzedrine tubes across the room. I kept rushing around, putting up new ones. We all took shots and meanwhile we talked. Bull was curious to know the reason for this trip. He peered at us and snuffed down his nose, *thfump*, like a sound in a dry tank.

'Now, Dean, I want you to sit quiet a minute and tell me what you're doing crossing the country like this.'

Dean could only blush and say, 'Ah well, you know how it is.'

'Sal, what are you going to the Coast for?'

'Only for a few days. I'm coming back to school.'



'What's the score with this Ed Dunkel? What kind of character is he?' At that moment Ed was making up to Galatea in the bedroom; it didn't take him long. We didn't know what to tell Bull about Ed Dunkel. Seeing that we didn't know anything about ourselves, he whipped out three sticks of tea and said to go ahead, supper'd be ready soon.

'Ain't nothing better in the world to give you an appetite. I once ate a horrible lunchcart hamburg on tea and it seemed like the most delicious thing in the world. I just got back from Houston last week, went to see Dale about our black-eyed peas. I was sleeping in a motel one morning when all of a sudden I was blasted out of bed. This damn fool had just shot his wife in the room next to mine. Everybody stood around confused, and the guy just got in his car and drove off, left the shotgun on the floor for the sheriff. They finally caught him in Houma, drunk as a lord. Man ain't safe going around this country any more without a gun.' He pulled back his coat and showed us his revolver. Then he opened the drawer and showed us the rest of his arsenal. In New York he once had a sub-machine-gun under his bed. 'I got something better than that now - German Scheintoth gas gun; look at this beauty, only got one shell. I could knock out a hundred men with this gun and have plenty of time to make a getaway. Only thing wrong, I only got one shell.'

'I hope I'm not around when you try it,' said Jane from the kitchen. 'How do *you* know it's a gas shell?' Bull snuffed; he never paid any attention to her sallies but he heard them. His relation with his wife was one of the strangest: they talked till late at night; Bull liked to hold the floor, he went right on in his dreary monotonous voice, she tried to break in, she never could; at dawn he got tired and then Jane talked and he listened, snuffing and going *thfump* down his nose. She loved that man madly, but in a delirious way of some kind; there was never any mooching and mincing around, just talk and a very deep companionship that none of us would ever be able to fathom. Something curiously unsympathetic and cold between them was really a form of humor by which they communicated their own set of subtle vibrations. Love is all; Jane was never more than ten feet away from Bull and never missed a word he said, and he spoke in a very low voice, too.

Dean and I were yelling about a big night in New Orleans and wanted Bull to show us around. He threw a damper on this. 'New Orleans is a very dull town. It's against the law to go to the colored section. The bars are insufferably dreary.'

I said, 'There must be some ideal bars in town.'

'The ideal bar doesn't exist in America. An ideal bar is something that's gone beyond our ken. In nineteen ten a bar was a place where men went to meet during or after work, and all there was was a long counter, brass rails, spittoons, player piano for music, a few mirrors, and barrels of whisky at ten cents a shot together with barrels of beer at five cents a mug. Now all you get is chromium, drunken women, fags, hostile bartenders, anxious owners who hover around the door worried about their leather seats and the law; just a lot of screaming at the wrong time and deadly silence when a stranger walks in.'

We argued about bars. 'All right,' he said, 'I'll take you to New Orleans tonight and show you what I mean.' And he deliberately took us to the dullest bars. We left Jane with the children; supper was over; she was reading the want ads of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. I asked her if she was looking for a job; she only said it was the most interesting part of the paper. Bull rode into town with us and went right on talking. 'Take it easy, Dean, we'll get there, I hope; hup, there's the ferry, you don't have to drive us clear into the river.' He held on. Dean had gotten worse, he confided in me. 'He seems to me to be headed for his ideal fate, which is compulsive psychosis dashed with a jigger of psychopathic irresponsibility and violence.' He looked at Dean out of the corner of his eye. 'If you go to California with this madman you'll never make it. Why don't you stay in New Orleans with me? We'll play the horses over to Graetna and relax in my yard. I've got a nice set of knives and I'm building a target. Some pretty juicy dolls downtown, too, if that's in your line these days.' He snuffed. We were on the ferry and Dean had leaped out to lean over the rail. I followed, but Bull sat on in the car, snuffing, *thfump*. There was a mystic wraith of fog over the brown waters that night, together with dark driftwoods; and across the way New Orleans glowed orange-bright, with a few dark ships at her hem, ghostly fogbound Cereno

ships with Spanish balconies and ornamental poops, till you got up close and saw they were just old freighters from Sweden and Panama. The ferry fires glowed in the night; the same Negroes plied the shovel and sang. Old Big Slim Hazard had once worked on the Algiers ferry as a deckhand; this made me think of Mississippi Gene too; and as the river poured down from mid-America by starlight I knew, I knew like mad that everything I had ever known and would ever know was One. Strange to say, too, that night we crossed the ferry with Bull Lee a girl committed suicide off the deck; either just before or just after us; we saw it in the paper the next day.

We hit all the dull bars in the French Quarter with Old Bull and went back home at midnight. That night Marylou took everything in the books; she took tea, goofballs, benny, liquor, and even asked Old Bull for a shot of M, which of course he didn't give her; he did give her a martini. She was so saturated with elements of all kinds that she came to a standstill and stood goofy on the porch with me. It was a wonderful porch Bull had. It ran clear around the house; by moonlight with the willows it looked like an old Southern mansion that had seen better days. In the house Jane sat reading the want ads in the living room; Bull was in the bathroom taking his fix, clutching his old black necktie in his teeth for a tourniquet and jabbing with the needle into his woesome arm with the thousand holes; Ed Dunkel was sprawled out with Galatea in the massive master bed that Old Bull and Jane never used; Dean was rolling tea; and Marylou and I imitated Southern aristocracy.

'Why, Miss Lou, you look lovely and most fetching tonight.'

'Why, thank you, Crawford, I sure do appreciate the nice things you do say.'

Doors kept opening around the crooked porch, and members of our sad drama in the American night kept popping out to find out where everybody was. Finally I took a walk alone to the levee. I wanted to sit on the muddy bank and dig the Mississippi River; instead of that I had to look at it with my nose against a wire fence. When you start separating the people from their rivers what have you got? 'Bureaucracy!' says Old Bull; he sits with Kafka on his lap, the lamp burns above him, he snuffs, *thfump*. His old house creaks. And the

Montana log rolls by in the big black river of the night. 'Tain't nothin but bureaucracy. And unions! Especially unions!' But dark laughter would come again.

## 7

It was there in the morning when I got up bright and early and found Old Bull and Dean in the back yard. Dean was wearing his gas-station coveralls and helping Bull. Bull had found a great big piece of thick rotten wood and was desperately yanking with a hammerhook at little nails imbedded in it. We stared at the nails; there were millions of them; they were like worms.

'When I get all these nails out of this I'm going to build me a shelf that'll last a *thousand years!*' said Bull, every bone shuddering with boyish excitement. 'Why, Sal, do you realize the shelves they build these days crack under the weight of knickknacks after six months or generally collapse? Same with houses, same with clothes. These bastards have invented plastics by which they could make houses that last *forever*. And tires. Americans are killing themselves by the millions every year with defective rubber tires that get hot on the road and blow up. They could make tires that never blow up. Same with tooth powder. There's a certain gum they've invented and they won't show it to anybody that if you chew it as a kid you'll never get a cavity for the rest of your born days. Same with clothes. They can make clothes that last forever. They prefer making cheap goods so's everybody'll have to go on working and punching timeclocks and organizing themselves in sullen unions and floundering around while the big grab goes on in Washington and Moscow.' He raised his big piece of rotten wood. 'Don't you think this'll make a splendid shelf?'

It was early in the morning; his energy was at its peak. The poor fellow took so much junk into his system he could only weather the greater proportion of his day in that chair with the lamp burning at noon, but in the morning he was magnificent. We began throwing knives at the target. He said he'd seen an Arab in Tunis who could stick a man's eye from forty feet. This got him going on his aunt, who



went to the Casbah in the thirties. 'She was with a party of tourists led by a guide. She had a diamond ring on her little finger. She leaned on a wall to rest a minute and an Ay-rab rushed up and appropriated her ring finger before she could let out a cry, my dear. She suddenly realized she had no little finger. Hi-hi-hi-hi-hi!' When he laughed he compressed his lips together and made it come out from his belly, from far away, and doubled up to lean on his knees. He laughed a long time. 'Hey Jane!' he yelled gleefully. 'I was just telling Dean and Sal about my aunt in the Casbah!'

'I heard you,' she said across the lovely warm Gulf morning from the kitchen door. Great beautiful clouds floated overhead, valley clouds that made you feel the vastness of old tumbledown holy America from mouth to mouth and tip to tip. All pep and juices was Bull. 'Say, did I ever tell you about Dale's father? He was the funniest old man you ever saw in your life. He had paresis, which eats away the forepart of your brain and you get so's you're not responsible for anything that comes into your mind. He had a house in Texas and had carpenters working twenty-four hours a day putting on new wings. He'd leap up in the middle of the night and say, "I don't want that goddam wing; put it over there." The carpenters had to take everything down and start all over again. Come dawn you'd see them hammering away at the new wing. Then the old man'd get bored with that and say, "Goddammit, I wanta go to Maine!" And he'd get into his car and drive off a hundred miles an hour - great showers of chicken feathers followed his track for hundreds of miles. He'd stop his car in the middle of a Texas town just to get out and buy some whisky. Traffic would honk all around him and he'd come rushing out of the store, yelling, "Thet your goddam noith, you bunth of bathats!" He lisped; when you have paresis you lips, I mean you lips. One night he came to my house in Cincinnati and tooted the horn and said, "Come on out and let's go to Texas to see Dale." He was going back from Maine. He claimed he bought a house - oh, we wrote a story about him at college, where you see this horrible shipwreck and people in the water clutching at the sides of the lifeboat, and the old man is there with a machete, hackin at their fingers. "Get away, ya bunth a bathats, thith my cottham boath!" Oh, he was horrible. I

could tell you stories about him all day. Say, ain't this a nice day?'

And it sure was. The softest breezes blew in from the levee; it was worth the whole trip. We went into the house after Bull to measure the wall for a shelf. He showed us the dining-room table he built. It was made of wood six inches thick. 'This is a table that'll last a thousand years!' said Bull, leaning his long thin face at us maniacally. He banged on it.

In the evenings he sat at this table, picking at his food and throwing the bones to the cats. He had seven cats. 'I love cats. I especially like the ones that squeal when I hold 'em over the bathtub.' He insisted on demonstrating; someone was in the bathroom. 'Well,' he said, 'we can't do that now. Say, I been having a fight with the neighbors next door.' He told us about the neighbors; they were a vast crew with sassy children who threw stones over the rickety fence at Dodie and Ray and sometimes at Old Bull. He told them to cut it out; the old man rushed out and yelled something in Portuguese. Bull went in the house and came back with his shotgun, upon which he leaned demurely; the incredible simper on his face beneath the long hatbrim, his whole body writhing coyly and snakily as he waited, a grotesque, lank, lonely clown beneath the clouds. The sight of him the Portuguese must have thought something out of an old evil dream.

We scoured the yard for things to do. There was a tremendous fence Bull had been working on to separate him from the obnoxious neighbors; it would never be finished, the task was too much. He rocked it back and forth to show how solid it was. Suddenly he grew tired and quiet and went in the house and disappeared in the bathroom for his pre-lunch fix. He came out glassy-eyed and calm, and sat down under his burning lamp. The sunlight poked feebly behind the drawn shade. 'Say, why don't you fellows try my orgone accumulator? Put some juice in your bones. I always rush up and take off ninety miles an hour for the nearest whorehouse, hor-hor-hor!' This was his 'laugh' laugh - when he wasn't really laughing. The orgone accumulator is an ordinary box big enough for a man to sit inside on a chair: a layer of wood, a layer of metal, and another layer of wood gather in orgones from the atmosphere and hold them captive long enough for the human body to absorb more than a usual share. According to Reich,

orgones are vibratory atmospheric atoms of the life-principle. People get cancer because they run out of orgones. Old Bull thought his orgone accumulator would be improved if the wood he used was as organic as possible, so he tied bushy bayou leaves and twigs to his mystical outhouse. It stood there in the hot, flat yard, an exfoliate machine clustered and bedecked with maniacal contrivances. Old Bull slipped off his clothes and went in to sit and moon over his navel. 'Say, Sal, after lunch let's you and me go play the horses over to the bookie joint in Graetna.' He was magnificent. He took a nap after lunch in his chair, the air gun on his lap and little Ray curled around his neck, sleeping. It was a pretty sight, father and son, a father who would certainly never bore his son when it came to finding things to do and talk about. He woke up with a start and stared at me. It took him a minute to recognize who I was. 'What are you going to the Coast for, Sal?' he asked, and went back to sleep in a moment.

In the afternoon we went to Graetna, just Bull and me. We drove in his old Chevy. Dean's Hudson was low and sleek; Bull's Chevy was high and rattly. It was just like 1910. The bookie joint was located near the waterfront in a big chromium-leather bar that opened up in the back to a tremendous hall where entries and numbers were posted on the wall. Louisiana characters lounged around with *Racing Forms*. Bull and I had a beer, and casually Bull went over to the slot machine and threw a half-dollar piece in. The counters clicked 'Jackpot' – 'Jackpot' – 'Jackpot' – and the last 'Jackpot' hung for just a moment and slipped back to 'Cherry.' He had lost a hundred dollars or more just by a hair. 'Damn!' yelled Bull. 'They got these things adjusted. You could see it right then. I had the jackpot and the mechanism clicked it back. Well, what you gonna do.' We examined the *Racing Form*. I hadn't played the horses in years and was bemused with all the new names. There was one horse called Big Pop that sent me into a temporary trance thinking of my father, who used to play the horses with me. I was just about to mention it to Old Bull when he said, 'Well I think I'll try this Ebony Corsair here.'

Then I finally said it. 'Big Pop reminds me of my father.'

He mused for just a second, his clear blue eyes fixed on mine hypnotically so that I couldn't tell what he was thinking or where he

was. Then he went over and bet on Ebony Corsair. Big Pop won and paid fifty to one.

'Damn!' said Bull. 'I should have known better, I've had experience with this before. Oh, when will we ever learn?'

'What do you mean?'

'Big Pop is what I mean. You had a vision, boy, a *vision*. Only damn fools pay no attention to visions. How do you know your father, who was an old horseplayer, just didn't momentarily communicate to you that Big Pop was going to win the race? The name brought the feeling up in you, he took advantage of the name to communicate. That's what I was thinking about when you mentioned it. My cousin in Missouri once bet on a horse that had a name that reminded him of his mother, and it won and paid a big price. The same thing happened this afternoon.' He shook his head. 'Ah, let's go. This is the last time I'll ever play the horses with you around; all these visions drive me to distraction.' In the car as we drove back to his old house he said, 'Mankind will someday realize that we are actually in contact with the dead and with the other world, whatever it is; right now we could predict, if we only exerted enough mental will, what is going to happen within the next hundred years and be able to take steps to avoid all kinds of catastrophes. When a man dies he undergoes a mutation in his brain that we know nothing about now but which will be very clear someday if scientists get on the ball. The bastards right now are only interested in seeing if they can blow up the world.'

We told Jane about it. She sniffed. 'It sounds silly to me.' She plied the broom around the kitchen. Bull went in the bathroom for his afternoon fix.

Out on the road Dean and Ed Dunkel were playing basketball with Dodie's ball and a bucket nailed on a lamppost. I joined in. Then we turned to feats of athletic prowess. Dean completely amazed me. He had Ed and me hold a bar of iron up to our waists, and just standing there he popped right over it, holding his heels. 'Go ahead, raise it.' We kept raising it till it was chest-high. Still he jumped over it with ease. Then he tried the running broad jump and did at least twenty feet and more. Then I raced him down the road. I can do the hundred in 10:5. He passed me like the wind. As we ran I had a mad vision of



Dean running through all of life just like that – his bony face outthrust to life, his arms pumping, his brow sweating, his legs twinkling like Groucho Marx, yelling, ‘Yes! Yes, man, you sure can go!’ But nobody could go as fast as he could, and that’s the truth. Then Bull came out with a couple of knives and started showing us how to disarm a would-be shivver in a dark alley. I for my part showed him a very good trick, which is falling on the ground in front of your adversary and gripping him with your ankles and flipping him over on his hands and grabbing his wrists in full nelson. He said it was pretty good. He demonstrated some jujitsu. Little Dodie called her mother to the porch and said, ‘Look at the silly men.’ She was such a cute sassy little thing that Dean couldn’t take his eyes off her.

‘Wow. Wait till *she* grows up! Can you see *her* cuttin down Canal Street with her cute eyes. Ah! Oh!’ He hissed through his teeth.

We spent a mad day in downtown New Orleans walking around with the Dunkels. Dean was out of his mind that day. When he saw the T & NO freight trains in the yard he wanted to show me everything at once. ‘You’ll be brakeman ’fore I’m through with ya!’ He and I and Ed Dunkel ran across the tracks and hopped a freight at three individual points; Marylou and Galatea were waiting in the car. We rode the train a half-mile into the piers, waving at switchmen and flagmen. They showed me the proper way to get off a moving car; the back foot first and let the train go away from you and come around and place the other foot down. They showed me the refrigerator cars, the ice compartments, good for a ride on any winter night in a string of empties. ‘Remember what I told you about New Mexico to LA?’ cried Dean. ‘This was the way I hung on . . .’

We got back to the girls an hour late and of course they were mad. Ed and Galatea had decided to get a room in New Orleans and stay there and work. This was okay with Bull, who was getting sick and tired of the whole mob. The invitation, originally, was for me to come alone. In the front room, where Dean and Marylou slept, there were jam and coffee stains and empty benny tubes all over the floor; what’s more it was Bull’s workroom and he couldn’t get on with his shelves. Poor Jane was driven to distraction by the continual jumping and running around on the part of Dean. We were waiting for my next

GI check to come through; my aunt was forwarding it. Then we were off, the three of us – Dean, Marylou, me. When the check came I realized I hated to leave Bull’s wonderful house so suddenly, but Dean was all energies and ready to do.

In a sad red dusk we were finally seated in the car and Jane, Dodie, little boy Ray, Bull, Ed, and Galatea stood around in the high grass, smiling. It was good-by. At the last moment Dean and Bull had a misunderstanding over money; Dean had wanted to borrow; Bull said it was out of the question. The feeling reached back to Texas days. Con-man Dean was antagonizing people away from him by degrees. He giggled maniacally and didn’t care; he rubbed his fly, stuck his finger in Marylou’s dress, slurped up her knee, frothed at the mouth, and said, ‘Darling, you know and I know that everything is straight between us at last beyond the furthest abstract definition in metaphysical terms or any terms you want to specify or sweetly impose or harken back . . .’ and so on, and zoom went the car and we were off again for California.

## 8

What is that feeling when you’re driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? – it’s the too-huge world vaulting us, and it’s good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies.

We wheeled through the sultry old light of Algiers, back on the ferry, back toward the mud-splashed, crabbed old ships across the river, back on Canal, and out; on a two-lane highway to Baton Rouge in purple darkness; swung west there, crossed the Mississippi at a place called Port Allen. Port Allen – where the river’s all rain and roses in a misty pinpoint darkness and where we swung around a circular drive in yellow foglight and suddenly saw the great black body below a bridge and crossed eternity again. What is the Mississippi River? – a washed clod in the rainy night, a soft plopping from drooping Missouri banks, a dissolving, a riding of the tide down the eternal waterbed, a contribution to brown foams, a voyaging past

endless vales and trees and levees, down along, down along, by Memphis, Greenville, Eudora, Vicksburg, Natchez, Port Allen, and Port Orleans and Port of the Deltas, by Potash, Venice, and the Night's Great Gulf, and out.

With the radio on to a mystery program, and as I looked out the window and saw a sign that said USE COOPER'S PAINT and I said, 'Okay, I will,' we rolled across the hoodwink night of the Louisiana plains – Lawtell, Eunice, Kinder, and De Quincy, western rickety towns becoming more bayou-like as we reached the Sabine. In Old Opelousas I went into a grocery store to buy bread and cheese while Dean saw to gas and oil. It was just a shack; I could hear the family eating supper in the back. I waited a minute; they went on talking. I took bread and cheese and slipped out the door. We had barely enough money to make Frisco. Meanwhile Dean took a carton of cigarettes from the gas station and we were stocked for the voyage – gas, oil, cigarettes, and food. Crooks don't know. He pointed the car straight down the road.

Somewhere near Starks we saw a great red glow in the sky ahead; we wondered what it was; in a moment we were passing it. It was a fire beyond the trees; there were many cars parked on the highway. It must have been some kind of fish-fry, and on the other hand it might have been anything. The country turned strange and dark near Deweyville. Suddenly we were in the swamps.

'Man, do you imagine what it would be like if we found a jazzjoint in these swamps, with great big black fellas moanin guitar blues and drinkin snakejuice and makin signs at us?'

'Yes!'

There were mysteries around here. The car was going over a dirt road elevated off the swamps that dropped on both sides and drooped with vines. We passed an apparition; it was a Negro man in a white shirt walking along with his arms up-spread to the inky firmament. He must have been praying or calling down a curse. We zoomed right by; I looked out the back window to see his white eyes. 'Whoo!' said Dean. 'Look out. We better not stop in this here country.' At one point we got stuck at a crossroads and stopped the car anyway. Dean turned off the headlamps. We were surrounded by a great forest of

viny trees in which we could almost hear the slither of a million copperheads. The only thing we could see was the red ampere button on the Hudson dashboard. Marylou squealed with fright. We began laughing maniac laughs to scare her. We were scared too. We wanted to get out of this mansion of the snake, this mireful drooping dark, and zoom on back to familiar American ground and cowtowns. There was a smell of oil and dead water in the air. This was a manuscript of the night we couldn't read. An owl hooted. We took a chance on one of the dirt roads, and pretty soon we were crossing the evil old Sabine River that is responsible for all these swamps. With amazement we saw great structures of light ahead of us. 'Texas! It's Texas! Beaumont oil town!' Huge oil tanks and refineries loomed like cities in the oily fragrant air.

'I'm glad we got out of there,' said Marylou. 'Let's play some more mystery programs now.'

We zoomed through Beaumont, over the Trinity River at Liberty, and straight for Houston. Now Dean got talking about his Houston days in 1947. 'Hassel! That mad Hassel! I look for him everywhere I go and I never find him. He used to get us so hung-up in Texas here. We'd drive in with Bull for groceries and Hassel'd disappear. We'd have to go looking for him in every shooting gallery in town.' We were entering Houston. 'We had to look for him in this spade part of town most of the time. Man, he'd be blasting with every mad cat he could find. One night we lost him and took a hotel room. We were supposed to bring ice back to Jane because her food was rotting. It took us two days to find Hassel. I got hung-up myself – I gunned shopping women in the afternoon, right here, downtown, supermarkets' – we flashed by in the empty night – 'and found a real gone dumb girl who was out of her mind and just wandering, trying to steal an orange. She was from Wyoming. Her beautiful body was matched only by her idiot mind. I found her babbling and took her back to the room. Bull was drunk trying to get this young Mexican kid drunk. Carlo was writing poetry on heroin. Hassel didn't show up till midnight at the jeep. We found him sleeping in the back seat. The ice was all melted. Hassel said he took about five sleeping pills. Man, if my memory could only serve me right the way my mind



works I could tell you every detail of the things we did. Ah, but we know time. Everything takes care of itself. I could close my eyes and this old car would take care of itself.'

In the empty Houston streets of four o'clock in the morning a motorcycle kid suddenly roared through, all bespangled and bedecked with glittering buttons, visor, slick black jacket, a Texas poet of the night, girl gripped on his back like a papoose, hair flying, onward-going, singing, 'Houston, Austin, Fort Worth, Dallas – and sometimes Kansas City – and sometimes old Antone, ah-haaaaa!' They pinpointed out of sight. 'Wow! Dig that gone gal on his belt! Let's all blow!' Dean tried to catch up with them. 'Now wouldn't it be fine if we could all get together and have a real going goofbang together with everybody sweet and fine and agreeable, no hassles, no infant rise of protest or body woes misconceptualized or sumpin? Ah! but we know time.' He bent to it and pushed the car.

Beyond Houston his energies, great as they were, gave out and I drove. Rain began to fall just as I took the wheel. Now we were on the great Texas plain and, as Dean said, 'You drive and drive and you're still in Texas tomorrow night.' The rain lashed down. I drove through a rickety little cowtown with a muddy main street and found myself in a dead end. 'Hey, what do I do?' They were both asleep. I turned and crawled back through town. There wasn't a soul in sight and not a single light. Suddenly a horseman in a raincoat appeared in my headlamps. It was the sheriff. He had a ten-gallon hat, drooping in the torrent. 'Which way to Austin?' He told me politely and I started off. Outside town I suddenly saw two headlamps flaring directly at me in the lashing rain. Whoops, I thought I was on the wrong side of the road; I eased right and found myself rolling in the mud; I rolled back to the road. Still the headlamps came straight for me. At the last moment I realized the other driver was on the wrong side of the road and didn't know it. I swerved at thirty into the mud; it was flat, no ditch, thank God. The offending car backed up in the downpour. Four sullen fieldworkers, snuck from their chores to brawl in drinking fields, all white shirts and dirty brown arms, sat looking at me dumbly in the night. The driver was as drunk as the lot.

He said, 'Which way t'Houston?' I pointed my thumb back. I was

thunderstruck in the middle of the thought that they had done this on purpose just to ask directions, as a panhandler advances on you straight up the sidewalk to bar your way. They gazed ruefully at the floor of their car, where empty bottles rolled, and clanked away. I started the car; it was stuck in the mud a foot deep. I sighed in the rainy Texas wilderness.

'Dean,' I said, 'wake up.'

'What?'

'We're stuck in the mud.'

'What happened?' I told him. He swore up and down. We put on old shoes and sweaters and barged out of the car into the driving rain. I put my back on the rear fender and lifted and heaved; Dean stuck chains under the swishing wheels. In a minute we were covered with mud. We woke up Marylou to these horrors and made her gun the car while we pushed. The tormented Hudson heaved and heaved. Suddenly it jolted out and went skidding across the road. Marylou pulled it up just in time, and we got in. That was that – the work had taken thirty minutes and we were soaked and miserable.

I fell asleep, all caked with mud; and in the morning when I woke up the mud was solidified and outside there was snow. We were near Fredericksburg, in the high plains. It was one of the worst winters in Texas and Western history, when cattle perished like flies in great blizzards and snow fell on San Francisco and LA. We were all miserable. We wished we were back in New Orleans with Ed Dunkel. Marylou was driving; Dean was sleeping. She drove with one hand on the wheel and the other reaching back to me in the back seat. She cooed promises about San Francisco. I slavered miserably over it. At ten I took the wheel – Dean was out for hours – and drove several hundred dreary miles across the bushy snows and ragged sage hills. Cowboys went by in baseball caps and earmuffs, looking for cows. Comfortable little homes with chimneys smoking appeared along the road at intervals. I wished we could go in for buttermilk and beans in front of the fireplace.

At Sonora I again helped myself to free bread and cheese while the proprietor chatted with a big rancher on the other side of the store. Dean huzzahed when he heard it; he was hungry. We couldn't spend

a cent on food. 'Yass, yass,' said Dean, watching the ranchers loping up and down Sonora main street, 'every one of them is a bloody millionaire, thousand head of cattle, workhands, buildings, money in the bank. If I lived around here I'd go be an idjit in the sagebrush, I'd be jackrabbit, I'd lick up the branches, I'd look for pretty cowgirls – hee-hee-hee-hee! Damn! Bam!' He socked himself. 'Yes! Right! Oh me!' We didn't know what he was talking about any more. He took the wheel and flew the rest of the way across the state of Texas, about five hundred miles, clear to El Paso, arriving at dusk and not stopping except once when he took all his clothes off, near Ozona, and ran yipping and leaping naked in the sage. Cars zoomed by and didn't see him. He scurried back to the car and drove on. 'Now Sal, now Marylou, I want both of you to do as I'm doing, disemburden yourselves of all that clothes – now what's the sense of clothes? now that's what I'm sayin – and sun your pretty bellies with me. Come on!' We were driving west into the sun; it fell in through the windshield. 'Open your belly as we drive into it.' Marylou complied; unfuddydud-died, so did I. We sat in the front seat, all three. Marylou took out cold cream and applied it to us for kicks. Every now and then a big truck zoomed by; the driver in high cab caught a glimpse of a golden beauty sitting naked with two naked men: you could see them swerve a moment as they vanished in our rear-view window. Great sage plains, snowless now, rolled on. Soon we were in the orange-rocked Pecos Canyon country. Blue distances opened up in the sky. We got out of the car to examine an old Indian ruin. Dean did so stark naked. Marylou and I put on our overcoats. We wandered among the old stones, hooting and howling. Certain tourists caught sight of Dean naked in the plain but they could not believe their eyes and wobbled on.

Dean and Marylou parked the car near Van Horn and made love while I went to sleep. I woke up just as we were rolling down the tremendous Rio Grande Valley through Clint and Ysleta to El Paso. Marylou jumped to the back seat, I jumped to the front seat, and we rolled along. To our left across the vast Rio Grande spaces were the moorish-red mounts of the Mexican border, the land of the Tarahumare; soft dusk played on the peaks. Straight ahead lay the

distant lights of El Paso and Juárez, sown in a tremendous valley so big that you could see several railroads puffing at the same time in every direction, as though it was the Valley of the World. We descended into it.

'Clint, Texas!' said Dean. He had the radio on to the Clint station. Every fifteen minutes they played a record; the rest of the time it was commercials about a high-school correspondence course. 'This program is beamed all over the West,' cried Dean excitedly. 'Man, I used to listen to it day and night in reform school and prison. All of us used to write in. You get a high-school diploma by mail, facsimile thereof, if you pass the test. All the young wranglers in the West, I don't care who, at one time or another write in for this; it's all they hear; you tune the radio in Sterling, Colorado, Lusk, Wyoming, I don't care where, you get Clint, Texas, Clint, Texas. And the music is always cowboy hillbilly and Mexican, absolutely the worst program in the entire history of the country and nobody can do anything about it. They have a tremendous beam; they've got the whole land hogtied.' We saw the high antenna beyond the shacks of Clint. 'Oh, man, the things I could tell you!' cried Dean, almost weeping. Eyes bent on Frisco and the Coast, we came into El Paso as it got dark, broke. We absolutely had to get some money for gas or we'd never make it.

We tried everything. We buzzed the travel bureau, but no one was going west that night. The travel bureau is where you go for share-the-gas rides, legal in the West. Shifty characters wait with battered suitcases. We went to the Greyhound bus station to try to persuade somebody to give us the money instead of taking a bus for the Coast. We were too bashful to approach anyone. We wandered around sadly. It was cold outside. A college boy was sweating at the sight of luscious Marylou and trying to look unconcerned. Dean and I consulted but decided we weren't pimps. Suddenly a crazy dumb young kid, fresh out of reform school, attached himself to us, and he and Dean rushed out for a beer. 'Come on, man, let's go mash somebody on the head and get his money.'

'I dig you, man!' yelled Dean. They dashed off. For a moment I was worried; but Dean only wanted to dig the streets of El Paso with



the kid and get his kicks. Marylou and I waited in the car. She put her arms around me.

I said, 'Dammit, Lou, wait till we get to Frisco.'

'I don't care. Dean's going to leave me anyway.'

'When are you going back to Denver?'

'I don't know. I don't care what I'm doing. Can I go back east with you?'

'We'll have to get some money in Frisco.'

'I know where you can get a job in a lunchcart behind the counter, and I'll be a waitress. I know a hotel where we can stay on credit. We'll stick together. Gee, I'm sad.'

'What are you sad about, kid?'

'I'm sad about everything. Oh damn, I wish Dean wasn't so crazy now.' Dean came twinkling back, giggling, and jumped in the car.

'What a crazy cat that was, whoo! Did I dig him! I used to know thousands of guys like that, they're all the same, their minds work in uniform clockwork, oh, the infinite ramifications, no time, no time . . .' And he shot up the car, hunched over the wheel, and roared out of El Paso. 'We'll just have to pick up hitchhikers. I'm positive we'll find some. Hup! hup! here we go. Look out!' he yelled at a motorist, and swung around him, and dodged a truck and bounced over the city limits. Across the river were the jewel lights of Juárez and the sad dry land and the jewel stars of Chihuahua. Marylou was watching Dean as she had watched him clear across the country and back, out of the corner of her eye – with a sullen, sad air, as though she wanted to cut off his head and hide it in her closet, an envious and rueful love of him so amazingly himself, all raging and sniffy and crazy-ways, a smile of tender dotage but also sinister envy that frightened me about her, a love she knew would never bear fruit because when she looked at his hangjawed bony face with its male self-containment and absent-mindedness she knew he was too mad. Dean was convinced Marylou was a whore; he confided in me that she was a pathological liar. But when she watched him like this it was love too; and when Dean noticed he always turned with his big false flirtatious smile, with the eyelashes fluttering and the teeth pearly white, while a moment ago he was only dreaming in his eternity. Then Marylou and I both

laughed – and Dean gave no sign of discomfiture, just a goofy glad grin that said to us, Ain't we gettin our kicks *anyway*? And that was it.

Outside El Paso, in the darkness, we saw a small huddled figure with thumb stuck out. It was our promised hitchhiker. We pulled up and backed to his side. 'How much money you got, kid?' The kid had no money; he was about seventeen, pale, strange, with one undeveloped crippled hand and no suitcase. 'Ain't he *sweet*?' said Dean, turning to me with a serious awe. 'Come on in, fella, we'll take you out –' The kid saw his advantage. He said he had an aunt in Tulare, California, who owned a grocery store and as soon as we got there he'd have some money for us. Dean rolled on the floor laughing, it was so much like the kid in North Carolina. 'Yes! Yes!' he yelled. 'We've *all* got aunts; well, let's go, let's see the aunts and the uncles and the grocery stores all the way ALONG that road!!' And we had a new passenger, and a fine little guy he turned out to be, too. He didn't say a word, he listened to us. After a minute of Dean's talk he was probably convinced he had joined a car of madmen. He said he was hitchhiking from Alabama to Oregon, where his home was. We asked him what he was doing in Alabama.

'I went to visit my uncle; he said he'd have a job for me in a lumber mill. The job fell through, so I'm comin back home.'

'Goin home,' said Dean, 'goin home, yes, I know, we'll take you home, far as Frisco anyhow.' But we didn't have any money. Then it occurred to me I could borrow five dollars from my old friend Hal Hingham in Tucson, Arizona. Immediately Dean said it was all settled and we were going to Tucson. And we did.

We passed Las Cruces, New Mexico, in the night and arrived in Arizona at dawn. I woke up from a deep sleep to find everybody sleeping like lambs and the car parked God knows where, because I couldn't see out the steamy windows. I got out of the car. We were in the mountains: there was a heaven of sunrise, cool purple airs, red mountainsides, emerald pastures in valleys, dew, and transmuting clouds of gold; on the ground gopher holes, cactus, mesquite. It was time for me to drive on. I pushed Dean and the kid over and went down the mountain with the clutch in and the motor off to save gas.

In this manner I rolled into Benson, Arizona. It occurred to me that I had a pocket watch Rocco had just given me for a birthday present, a four-dollar watch. At the gas station I asked the man if he knew a pawnshop in Benson. It was right next door to the station. I knocked, someone got up out of bed, and in a minute I had a dollar for the watch. It went into the tank. Now we had enough gas for Tucson. But suddenly a big pistol-packing trooper appeared, just as I was ready to pull out, and asked to see my driver's license. 'The fella in the back seat has the license,' I said. Dean and Marylou were sleeping together under the blanket. The cop told Dean to come out. Suddenly he whipped out his gun and yelled, 'Keep your hands up!'

'Offisah,' I heard Dean say in the most unctious and ridiculous tones, 'offisah, I was only buttoning my flah.' Even the cop almost smiled. Dean came out, muddy, ragged, T-shirted, rubbing his belly, cursing, looking everywhere for his license and his car papers. The cop rummaged through our back trunk. All the papers were straight.

'Only checking up,' he said with a broad smile. 'You can go on now. Benson ain't a bad town actually; you might enjoy it if you had breakfast here.'

'Yes yes yes,' said Dean, paying absolutely no attention to him, and drove off. We all sighed with relief. The police are suspicious when gangs of youngsters come by in new cars without a cent in their pockets and have to pawn watches. 'Oh, they're always interfering,' said Dean, 'but he was a much better cop than that rat in Virginia. They try to make headline arrests; they think every car going by is some big Chicago gang. They ain't got nothin else to do.' We drove on to Tucson.

Tucson is situated in beautiful mesquite riverbed country, overlooked by the snowy Catalina range. The city was one big construction job; the people transient, wild, ambitious, busy, gay; washlines, trailers; bustling downtown streets with banners; altogether very Californian. Fort Lowell Road, out where Hingham lived, wound along lovely riverbed trees in the flat desert. We saw Hingham himself brooding in the yard. He was a writer; he had come to Arizona to work on his book in peace. He was a tall, gangly, shy satirist who mumbled to you with his head turned away and always said funny things. His wife and

baby were with him in the dobe house, a small one that his Indian stepfather had built. His mother lived across the yard in her own house. She was an excited American woman who loved pottery, beads, and books. Hingham had heard of Dean through letters from New York. We came down on him like a cloud, every one of us hungry, even Alfred, the crippled hitchhiker. Hingham was wearing an old sweater and smoking a pipe in the keen desert air. His mother came out and invited us into her kitchen to eat. We cooked noodles in a great pot.

Then we all drove to a crossroads liquor store, where Hingham cashed a check for five dollars and handed me the money.

There was a brief good-by. 'It certainly was pleasant,' said Hingham, looking away. Beyond some trees, across the sand, a great neon sign of a roadhouse glowed red. Hingham always went there for a beer when he was tired of writing. He was very lonely, he wanted to get back to New York. It was sad to see his tall figure receding in the dark as we drove away, just like the other figures in New York and New Orleans: they stand uncertainly underneath immense skies, and everything about them is drowned. Where go? what do? what for? — sleep. But this foolish gang was bending onward.

## 9

Outside Tucson we saw another hitchhiker in the dark road. This was an Okie from Bakersfield, California, who put down his story. 'Hot damn, I left Bakersfield with the travel-bureau car and left my gui-tar in the trunk of another one and they never showed up — gui-tar and cowboy duds; you see, I'm a moo-sician, I was headed for Arizona to play with Johnny Mackaw's Sagebrush Boys. Well, hell, here I am in Arizona, broke, and m'gui-tar's been stoled. You boys drive me back to Bakersfield and I'll get the money from my brother. How much you want?' We wanted just enough gas to make Frisco from Bakersfield, about three dollars. Now we were five in the car. 'Evenin, ma'am,' he said, tipping his hat to Marylou, and we were off.

In the middle of the night we overtopped the lights of Palm Springs



from a mountain road. At dawn, in snowy passes, we labored toward the town of Mojave, which was the entryway to the great Tehachapi Pass. The Okie woke up and told funny stories; sweet little Alfred sat smiling. Okie told us he knew a man who forgave his wife for shooting him and got her out of prison, only to be shot a second time. We were passing the women's prison when he told it. Up ahead we saw Tehachapi Pass starting up. Dean took the wheel and carried us clear to the top of the world. We passed a great shroudy cement factory in the canyon. Then we started down. Dean cut off the gas, threw in the clutch, and negotiated every hairpin turn and passed cars and did everything in the books without the benefit of accelerator. I held on tight. Sometimes the road went up again briefly; he merely passed cars without a sound, on pure momentum. He knew every rhythm and every kick of a first-class pass. When it was time to U-turn left around a low stone wall that overlooked the bottom of the world, he just leaned far over to his left, hands on the wheel, stiff-armed, and carried it that way; and when the turn snaked to the right again, this time with a cliff on our left, he leaned far to the right, making Marylou and me lean with him. In this way we floated and flapped down to the San Joaquin Valley. It lay spread a mile below, virtually the floor of California, green and wondrous from our aerial shelf. We made thirty miles without using gas.

Suddenly we were all excited. Dean wanted to tell me everything he knew about Bakersfield as we reached the city limits. He showed me rooming houses where he stayed, railroad hotels, poolhalls, diners, sidings where he jumped off the engine for grapes, Chinese restaurants where he ate, park benches where he met girls, and certain places where he'd done nothing but sit and wait around. Dean's California – wild, sweaty, important, the land of lonely and exiled and eccentric lovers come to forgather like birds, and the land where everybody somehow looked like broken-down, handsome, decadent movie actors. 'Man, I spent hours on that very chair in front of that drugstore!' He remembered all – every pinochle game, every woman, every sad night. And suddenly we were passing the place in the railyards where Terry and I had sat under the moon, drinking wine, on those bum crates, in October 1947, and I tried to tell him. But he was too excited.

'This is where Dunkel and I spent a whole morning drinking beer, trying to make a real gone little waitress from Watsonville – no, Tracy, yes, Tracy – and her name was Esmeralda – oh, man, something like that.' Marylou was planning what to do the moment she arrived in Frisco. Alfred said his aunt would give him plenty of money up in Tulare. The Okie directed us to his brother in the flats outside town.

We pulled up at noon in front of a little rose-covered shack, and the Okie went in and talked with some women. We waited fifteen minutes. 'I'm beginning to think this guy has no more money than I have,' said Dean. 'We get more hung-up! There's probably nobody in the family that'll give him a cent after that fool escapade.' The Okie came out sheepishly and directed us to town.

'Hot damn, I wisht I could find my brother.' He made inquiries. He probably felt he was our prisoner. Finally we went to a big bread bakery, and the Okie came out with his brother, who was wearing coveralls and was apparently the truck mechanic inside. He talked with his brother a few minutes. We waited in the car. Okie was telling all his relatives his adventures and about the loss of his guitar. But he got the money, and he gave it to us, and we were all set for Frisco. We thanked him and took off.

Next stop was Tulare. Up the valley we roared. I lay in the back seat, exhausted, giving up completely, and sometime in the afternoon, while I dozed, the muddy Hudson zoomed by the tents outside Sabinal where I had lived and loved and worked in the spectral past. Dean was bent rigidly over the wheel, pounding the rods. I was sleeping when we finally arrived in Tulare; I woke up to hear the insane details. 'Sal, wake up! Alfred found his aunt's grocery store, but do you know what happened? His aunt shot her husband and went to jail. The store's closed down. We didn't get a cent. Think of it! The things that happen; the Okie told us the same likewise story, the trou-bles on all sides, the complications of events – whee, damn!' Alfred was biting his fingernails. We were turning off the Oregon road at Madera, and there we made our farewell with little Alfred. We wished him luck and Godspeed to Oregon. He said it was the best ride he ever had.

It seemed like a matter of minutes when we began rolling in the foothills before Oakland and suddenly reached a height and saw

stretched out ahead of us the fabulous white city of San Francisco on her eleven mystic hills with the blue Pacific and its advancing wall of potato-patch fog beyond, and smoke and goldenness in the late afternoon of time. 'There she blows!' yelled Dean. 'Wow! Made it! Just enough gas! Give me water! No more land! We can't go any further 'cause there ain't no more land! Now Marylou, darling, you and Sal go immediately to a hotel and wait for me to contact you in the morning as soon as I have definite arrangements made with Camille and call up Frenchman about my railroad watch and you and Sal buy the first thing hit town a paper for the want ads and workplans.' And he drove into the Oakland Bay Bridge and it carried us in. The downtown office buildings were just sparkling on their lights; it made you think of Sam Spade. When we staggered out of the car on O'Farrell Street and sniffed and stretched, it was like getting on shore after a long voyage at sea; the slopy street reeled under our feet; secret chop sueys from Frisco Chinatown floated in the air. We took all our things out of the car and piled them on the sidewalk.

Suddenly Dean was saying good-by. He was bursting to see Camille and find out what had happened. Marylou and I stood dumbly in the street and watched him drive away. 'You see what a bastard he is?' said Marylou. 'Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it's in his interest.'

'I know,' I said, and I looked back east and sighed. We had no money. Dean hadn't mentioned money. 'Where are we going to stay?' We wandered around, carrying our bundles of rags in the narrow romantic streets. Everybody looked like a broken-down movie extra, a withered starlet; disenchanting stunt-men, midget auto-racers, poignant California characters with their end-of-the-continent sadness, handsome, decadent, Casanova-ish men, puffy-eyed motel blondes, hustlers, pimps, whores, masseurs, bellhops – a lemon lot, and how's a man going to make a living with a gang like that?

## 10

Nevertheless Marylou had been around these people – not far from the Tenderloin – and a gray-faced hotel clerk let us have a room on credit. That was the first step. Then we had to eat, and didn't do so till midnight, when we found a nightclub singer in her hotel room who turned an iron upside down on a coathanger in the wastebasket and warmed up a can of pork and beans. I looked out the window at the winking neons and said to myself, Where is Dean and why isn't he concerned about our welfare? I lost faith in him that year. I stayed in San Francisco a week and had the best time of my life. Marylou and I walked around for miles, looking for food-money. We even visited some drunken seamen in a flophouse on Mission Street that she knew; they offered us whisky.

In the hotel we lived together two days. I realized that, now Dean was out of the picture, Marylou had no real interest in me; she was trying to reach Dean through me, his buddy. We had arguments in the room. We also spent entire nights in bed and I told her my dreams. I told her about the big snake of the world that was coiled in the earth like a worm in an apple and would someday nudge up a hill to be thereafter known as Snake Hill and fold out upon the plain, a hundred miles long and devouring as it went along. I told her this snake was Satan. 'What's going to happen?' she squealed; meanwhile she held me tight.

'A saint called Doctor Sax will destroy it with secret herbs which he is at this very moment cooking up in his underground shack somewhere in America. It may also be disclosed that the snake is just a husk of doves; when the snake dies great clouds of seminal-gray doves will flutter out and bring tidings of peace around the world.' I was out of my mind with hunger and bitterness.

One night Marylou disappeared with a nightclub owner. I was waiting for her by appointment in a doorway across the street, at Larkin and Geary, hungry, when she suddenly stepped out of the foyer of the fancy apartment house with her girl friend, the nightclub owner, and a greasy old man with a roll. Originally she'd just gone



in to see her girl friend. I saw what a whore she was. She was afraid to give me the sign, though she saw me in that doorway. She walked on little feet and got in the Cadillac and off they went. Now I had nobody, nothing.

I walked around, picking butts from the street. I passed a fish-'n-chips joint on Market Street, and suddenly the woman in there gave me a terrified look as I passed; she was the proprietress, she apparently thought I was coming in there with a gun to hold up the joint. I walked on a few feet. It suddenly occurred to me this was my mother of about two hundred years ago in England, and that I was her footpad son, returning from gaol to haunt her honest labors in the hashery. I stopped, frozen with ecstasy on the sidewalk. I looked down Market Street. I didn't know whether it was that or Canal Street in New Orleans: it led to water, ambiguous, universal water, just as 42nd Street, New York, leads to water, and you never know where you are. I thought of Ed Dunkel's ghost on Times Square. I was delirious. I wanted to go back and leer at my strange Dickensian mother in the hash joint. I tingled all over from head to foot. It seemed I had a whole host of memories leading back to 1750 in England and that I was in San Francisco now only in another life and in another body. 'No,' that woman seemed to say with that terrified glance, 'don't come back and plague your honest, hard-working mother. You are no longer like a son to me – and like your father, my first husband. 'Ere this kindly Greek took pity on me.' (The proprietor was a Greek with hairy arms.) 'You are no good, inclined to drunkenness and routs and final disgraceful robbery of the fruits of my 'umble labors in the hashery. O son! did you not ever go on your knees and pray for deliverance for all your sins and scoundrel's acts? Lost boy! Depart! Do not haunt my soul; I have done well forgetting you. Reopen no old wounds, be as if you had never returned and looked in to me – to see my laboring humilities, my few scrubbed pennies – hungry to grab, quick to deprive, sullen, unloved, mean-minded son of my flesh. Son! Son!' It made me think of the Big Pop vision in Graetna with Old Bull. And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the

bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent and inconceivable radiances shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotus-lands falling open in the magic mothswarm of heaven. I could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn't in my ear but everywhere and had nothing to do with sounds. I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn't remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy, a magical action for naught, like falling asleep and waking up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. I realized it was only because of the stability of the intrinsic Mind that these ripples of birth and death took place, like the action of wind on a sheet of pure, serene, mirror-like water. I felt sweet, swinging bliss, like a big shot of heroin in the mainline vein; like a gulp of wine late in the afternoon and it makes you shudder; my feet tingled. I thought I was going to die the very next moment. But I didn't die, and walked four miles and picked up ten long butts and took them back to Marylou's hotel room and poured their tobacco in my old pipe and lit up. I was too young to know what had happened. In the window I smelled all the food of San Francisco. There were seafood places out there where the buns were hot, and the baskets were good enough to eat too; where the menus themselves were soft with foody esculence as though dipped in hot broths and roasted dry and good enough to eat too. Just show me the bluefish spangle on a seafood menu and I'd eat it; let me smell the drawn butter and lobster claws. There were places where they specialized in thick red roast beef *au jus*, or roast chicken basted in wine. There were places where hamburgs sizzled on grills and the coffee was only a nickel. And oh, that pan-fried chow mein flavored air that blew into my room from Chinatown, vying with the spaghetti sauces of North Beach, the soft-shell crab of Fisherman's Wharf – nay, the ribs of Fillmore turning on spits! Throw in the Market Street chili beans, redhot, and french-fried potatoes of the Embarcadero wino night, and steamed clams from Sausalito across the bay, and that's my ah-dream of San Francisco. Add fog,

hunger-making raw fog, and the throb of neons in the soft night, the clack of high-heeled beauties, white doves in a Chinese grocery window . . .

## 11

That was the way Dean found me when he finally decided I was worth saving. He took me home to Camille's house. 'Where's Marylou, man?'

'The whore ran off.' Camille was a relief after Marylou; a well-bred, polite young woman, and she was aware of the fact that the eighteen dollars Dean had sent her was mine. But O where went thou, sweet Marylou? I relaxed a few days in Camille's house. From her living-room window in the wooden tenement on Liberty Street you could see all of San Francisco burning green and red in the rainy night. Dean did the most ridiculous thing of his career the few days I was there. He got a job demonstrating a new kind of pressure cooker in the kitchens of homes. The salesman gave him piles of samples and pamphlets. The first day Dean was a hurricane of energy. I drove all over town with him as he made appointments. The idea was to get invited socially to a dinner party and then leap up and start demonstrating the pressure cooker. 'Man,' cried Dean excitedly, 'this is even crazier than the time I worked for Sinah. Sinah sold encyclopedias in Oakland. Nobody could turn him down. He made long speeches, he jumped up and down, he laughed, he cried. One time we broke into an Okie house where everybody was getting ready to go to a funeral. Sinah got down on his knees and prayed for the deliverance of the deceased soul. All the Okies started crying. He sold a complete set of encyclopedias. He was the maddest guy in the world. I wonder where he is. We used to get next to pretty young daughters and feel them up in the kitchen. This afternoon I had the gonest housewife in her little kitchen – arm around her, demonstrating. Ah! Hmm! Wow!'

'Keep it up, Dean,' I said. 'Maybe someday you'll be mayor of San Francisco.' He had the whole cookpot spiel worked out; he practiced on Camille and me in the evenings.

One morning he stood naked, looking at all San Francisco out the window as the sun came up. He looked like someday he'd be the pagan mayor of San Francisco. But his energies ran out. One rainy afternoon the salesman came around to find out what Dean was doing. Dean was sprawled on the couch. 'Have you been trying to sell these?'

'No,' said Dean, 'I have another job coming up.'

'Well, what are you going to do about all these samples?'

'I don't know.' In a dead silence the salesman gathered up his sad pots and left. I was sick and tired of everything and so was Dean.

But one night we suddenly went mad together again; we went to see Slim Gaillard in a little Frisco nightclub. Slim Gaillard is a tall, thin Negro with big sad eyes who's always saying, 'Right-orooni' and 'How 'bout a little bourbonorooni.' In Frisco great eager crowds of young semi-intellectuals sat at his feet and listened to him on the piano, guitar, and bongo drums. When he gets warmed up he takes off his shirt and undershirt and really goes. He does and says anything that comes into his head. He'll sing 'Cement Mixer, Put-ti Put-ti' and suddenly slow down the beat and brood over his bongos with fingertips barely tapping the skin as everybody leans forward breathlessly to hear; you think he'll do this for a minute or so, but he goes right on, for as long as an hour, making an imperceptible little noise with the tips of his fingernails, smaller and smaller all the time till you can't hear it any more and sounds of traffic come in the open door. Then he slowly gets up and takes the mike and says, very slowly, 'Great-orooni . . . fine-ovauti . . . hello-orooni . . . bourbon-orooni . . . all-orooni . . . how are the boys in the front row making out with their girls-orooni . . . orooni . . . vauti . . . oroonirooni . . .' He keeps this up for fifteen minutes, his voice getting softer and softer till you can't hear. His great sad eyes scan the audience.

Dean stands in the back, saying, 'God! Yes!' – and clasping his hands in prayer and sweating. 'Sal, Slim knows time, he knows time.' Slim sits down at the piano and hits two notes, two Cs, then two more, then one, then two, and suddenly the big burly bass-player wakes up from a reverie and realizes Slim is playing 'C-Jam Blues' and he slugs in his big forefinger on the string and the big booming



beat begins and everybody starts rocking and Slim looks just as sad as ever, and they blow jazz for half an hour, and then Slim goes mad and grabs the bongos and plays tremendous rapid Cubana beats and yells crazy things in Spanish, in Arabic, in Peruvian dialect, in Egyptian, in every language he knows, and he knows innumerable languages. Finally the set is over; each set takes two hours. Slim Gaillard goes and stands against a post, looking sadly over everybody's head as people come to talk to him. A bourbon is slipped into his hand. 'Bourbon-orooni - thank-you-ovauti . . .' Nobody knows where Slim Gaillard is. Dean once had a dream that he was having a baby and his belly was all bloated up blue as he lay on the grass of a California hospital. Under a tree, with a group of colored men, sat Slim Gaillard. Dean turned despairing eyes of a mother to him. Slim said, 'There you go-orooni.' Now Dean approached him, he approached his God; he thought Slim was God; he shuffled and bowed in front of him and asked him to join us. 'Right-orooni,' says Slim; he'll join anybody but he won't guarantee to be there with you in spirit. Dean got a table, bought drinks, and sat stiffly in front of Slim. Slim dreamed over his head. Every time Slim said, 'Orooni,' Dean said, 'Yes!' I sat there with these two madmen. Nothing happened. To Slim Gaillard the whole world was just one big orooni.

That same night I dug Lampshade on Fillmore and Geary. Lampshade is a big colored guy who comes into musical Frisco saloons with coat, hat, and scarf and jumps on the bandstand and starts singing; the veins pop in his forehead; he heaves back and blows a big foghorn blues out of every muscle in his soul. He yells at people while he's singing: '*Don't die to go to heaven, start in on Doctor Pepper and end up on whisky!*' His voice booms over everything. He grimaces, he writhes, he does everything. He came over to our table and leaned over to us and said, 'Yes!' And then he staggered out to the street to hit another saloon. Then there's Connie Jordan, a madman who sings and flips his arms and ends up splashing sweat on everybody and kicking over the mike and screaming like a woman; and you see him late at night, exhausted, listening to wild jazz sessions at Jamson's Nook with big round eyes and limp shoulders, a big gooky stare into space, and a drink in front of him. I never saw such crazy musicians.

Everybody in Frisco blew. It was the end of the continent; they didn't give a damn. Dean and I goofed around San Francisco in this manner until I got my next GI check and got ready to go back home.

What I accomplished by coming to Frisco I don't know. Camille wanted me to leave; Dean didn't care one way or the other. I bought a loaf of bread and meats and made myself ten sandwiches to cross the country with again; they were all going to go rotten on me by the time I got to Dakota. The last night Dean went mad and found Marylou somewhere downtown and we got in the car and drove all over Richmond across the bay, hitting Negro jazz shacks in the oil flats. Marylou went to sit down and a colored guy pulled the chair out from under her. The gals approached her in the john with propositions. I was approached too. Dean was sweating around. It was the end; I wanted to get out.

At dawn I got my New York bus and said good-by to Dean and Marylou. They wanted some of my sandwiches. I told them no. It was a sullen moment. We were all thinking we'd never see one another again and we didn't care.